



IEP GUIDE

The IEP process can feel overwhelming, but you are not alone. This IEP Guide is designed to help you navigate the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process, understand your rights and responsibilities, and become active partners in supporting your child's educational success. It takes a village to facilitate meaningful growth and together, we can ensure your child receives the services, supports, and opportunities needed to thrive.

What is an IEP?

An **IEP**—short for **Individualized Education Program**—is a legal, customized learning plan for a student in public school who has a disability that affects their ability to learn in a typical classroom. Think of it as a roadmap that ensures a child gets the support, services, and accommodations they need to succeed.

Does My Child Qualify for an IEP?

Your child may qualify if **two things are true**:

Your child has one of the disabilities listed under the federal law **IDEA** (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act).

Examples include:

Specific Learning Disability

8 categories: Oral Expression, Listening Comprehension, Basic Reading Skills, Reading Fluency, Reading Comprehension, Written Expression, Math Calculations, Math Problem Solving

Dyslexia (now supported and serviced under IDEA)

Intellectual Disability (ID)

Autism (AU)

Other Health Impairments (i.e. ADHD, Cerebral Palsy, Diabetes, Tourettes, Epilepsy, Cancer, etc.)

In Texas, it's required that a physician's report documenting your child's medical diagnosis be submitted as part of the evaluation

process in order to qualify for Special Education services.

Speech or Language impairment (SI)

Emotional Disability (ED)

Deaf or Hard of Hearing Impairment (DHH)

Deaf-Blindness (DB)

Vision Impairment (VI)

Orthopedic Impairment (OI)

The disability **must impact the child's ability to learn** in a general education classroom **and** they need specialized instruction to make progress.

If a child has a disability but *doesn't* need specialized instruction, they may instead qualify for a **504 Plan**.

How to Request an Evaluation:

You must submit a written request to your child's counselor or administrator. Some districts may also allow these requests to be submitted to an at-risk and/or RTI team. You should check with your campus for specific information on "who" but the "how", which is through written request, is universal.

This written request should include what kind of evaluation you're requesting and how the suspected disability is currently affecting your child in the "school" setting. This also includes requesting any additional evaluations/assessments, even after your child already has an IEP.

It's important to understand that based on data collected, to include grades, teacher feedback, attendance and assessments, your request for an evaluation can be denied if there is no evidence of an educational need. Failure alone does not justify a need, nor does passing grades equate to no need.

Types of Evaluations:

Academic Achievement

Psychological and Cognitive

Speech and Language

Adaptive Behavior & Life Skills

Motor Skills

Supplemental Assessments/Evaluations:

Functional Behavior Assessment

Assistive Technology

Sensory Processing

Road Map to an IEP:

Texas uses the **ARD process** — *Admission, Review, and Dismissal* — which is the Texas

name for the IEP team and meetings. The steps below walk you from the very beginning (requesting an evaluation) to ongoing support.

01 | Request an Evaluation

You or the school can request testing if you suspect a disability; the school must respond within 15 school days with written notice.

02 | Review Existing Information

The school looks at what they already know about your child to decide what additional testing is needed.

03 | Receive Your Rights Notice

The school gives you a document explaining your parent rights in the special education process.

04 | Give Consent for Testing

The school cannot evaluate your child until you sign permission.

05 | Complete the Evaluation

Specialists test your child in all areas of suspected need; this must be finished within 45 school days after you consent.

06 | Attend the ARD/IEP Planning Meeting

The team reviews evaluation results and discusses whether your child qualifies for special education.

07 | Develop the IEP

If eligible, the team creates a personalized plan with goals, services, and accommodations.

08 | Begin Services and Monitor Progress

The school starts providing the services in the IEP and collects data to track your child's progress.

09 | Review and Adjust as Needed

The ARD committee meets at least once a year to update the IEP, but you or the campus can request a meeting anytime.

What happens in an IEP Meeting?

An IEP should contain how your child's disability may affect (impact statement) and is currently affecting them in the school setting, accommodations and/or modifications needed for your student to access the general education curriculum, what services will be provided that will assist with your child's areas of growth and measurable annual goals to monitor your child's progress. The IEP is developed by a team that includes campus staff (i.e. case manager, general education teacher, administrator, school psychologist, nurse, counselor, etc.), specialists based on the services needed (i.e. speech pathologist (SP), occupational therapist (OT), physical therapist (PT), assistive

technology (AT), visual impaired specialist (VI), orientation & mobility specialist (O&M), behavior specialist, etc.) and the student's family. It's legally binding and schools, meaning ALL staff involved with your student, MUST follow it.

Parent Rights in an IEP meeting:

Right to participate — You are an EQUAL member and are allowed to be at every IEP meeting and to share your thoughts, concerns, and ideas. The school cannot create or change your child's IEP without giving you the chance to be involved.

Right to be informed — The school must explain things in clear language you can understand. You should receive information about your rights and about anything the school wants to evaluate or change. (i.e. meeting notice, procedural safeguards **Right to consent** — The school must ask for your permission before evaluating your child or starting special education services. You can say yes, no, or ask for more information.

Right to see your child's records — You can look at all of your child's school records, including evaluations, notes, and data used to make decisions.

Right to bring support — You can bring someone with you — a friend, family member, therapist, or advocate — anyone who knows your child or can help you feel more comfortable.

Right to ask questions — You can ask for explanations at any time. If something doesn't make sense, the team must slow down and clarify.

Right to disagree — If you don't agree with the school's plan, you can say so. You can request another meeting, ask for another evaluation, or use formal steps like mediation. You do *not* have to sign anything on the spot.

Right to a real voice — Your input must be taken seriously, and the team must be open to adjusting the plan based on your concerns.

Questions Parents Should Ask:

Can additional needs outside of my child's primary disability be met?

An IEP is to support the WHOLE child. For example, just because a student only qualifies with a Specific Learning Disability, doesn't mean their IEP can't also address executive functioning skills or behavior. If it's affecting their ability to access the curriculum and obtainment of these skills require specialized instruction, the IEP team has a duty to discuss how those additional needs will be supported.

What type of data will be collected?

IEP accommodations, goals and support/services should be rooted in data and the type of data required is agreed on during goal setting and program determinations within the ARD meeting. You can request to review data collected on your child AT ANY TIME. If behavioral/functional data is being collected, you can also request to

receive this on a consistent schedule.

Can I have a copy of the prior written notice (PWN)?

The PWN provides you with the reason for the meeting, topics discussed during the meeting, IEP proposals and rejections, why they were proposed or rejected and the data used to support these decisions. Some districts already utilize the PWN so check with your individual campuses/districts to see if this would apply to you. *What are the options and criteria for a more restrictive environment?*

Even if an MRE is not appropriate, based on the data, at the time of your ARD meeting, or not something you're ready to consider, it's important to know your campus/district's instructional settings and what would qualify your student for a change of placement. This allows for open, uncontentious dialogue surrounding the benefits of each setting, how they can impact your students' needs and clarify any misconceptions about each setting.

Tips for Parents:

Once your child turns 18, no matter what their disability is or the level of support they require, they become the adult student in their ARD meetings.

Start planning who will have educational rights as early as possible! Options include guardianship, power of attorney and supportive decision making (check with your individual campuses/districts as they may have different names).

Be as honest and open as possible about your child's life outside of school. The ARD committee is here to support, not judge. A child with a disability doesn't only have that disability at school; it can manifest across all environments. As a team, it's important that ALL factors potentially affecting a student's growth be discussed (i.e. life crisis, medication, changes in the home, etc.), as there is other personnel that can be invited to ARD meetings that can offer additional resources that the IEP may not be able to address.

If you don't understand something, whether it be a service, support, wording, etc., ask for clarification as many times as you need to!

Never feel like you have to accept what is being said without asking for clarification and, if needed, explanation. Special Education is about creating accessibility and it is your right to understand how your child will be supported. Understanding your child's disability and paperwork clearly also allows you to be an effective advocate, explain your child's needs and assist with generalizing support into your home and other non-academic environments.

Request a draft 48-72 hours prior to your child's ARD meetings.

This allows you to review data provided within the IEP and campus proposals without feeling rushed and bombarded with oral discussion and questions. You'll have the opportunity to tag/highlight portions of the IEP where you require clarification and write down additional questions based on new information

provided. This will help the ARD committee have more meaningful conversation surrounding academic and/or behavioral concerns and provide you with more confidence when making decisions.

If a required member can not be present and offers to discuss their portion with you prior to the meeting, don't feel obligated to oblige.

This isn't a red flag and prior discussions are helpful, however, sometimes additional questions or concerns can arise through ARD discussion and the person who can speak to them won't be there. It is your right to request the meeting be rescheduled so all required members can be in attendance.

It is your right to receive written notice 5 days prior to a scheduled ARD meeting.

An ARD meeting must be held at a mutually agreed date/time, meaning all parties required to attend are able to participate. If the ARD is scheduled within less than 5 days, you can agree and waive your 5 days notice. However, if the scheduled meeting does not conform with your availability, it is your right to request you be given, at minimum, your 5 days notice.

Modifications vs. Accommodations

Modifications change *WHAT* your student is expected to learn. Modifications are usually implemented for students who are more than 3 grade levels behind their same aged peers. The curriculum or performance standard is adjusted due to your student not being able to meet grade level expectations, even with accommodations and supports.

For example: All students are expected to read a 3rd grade level passage and answer comprehension questions. Your student is expected to read a Kindergarten level passage and answer comprehension questions.

Accommodations change *HOW* your student learns or accesses the curriculum.

Accommodations provide support to facilitate learning, while maintaining the same curriculum or performance based expectations as their same aged peers. These can include reduced assignments, text to speech, preferential seating, highlighted materials, etc.

For example: All students are expected to read a 3rd grade level passage independently and answer 5 comprehension questions. Your student is expected to listen to a 3rd grade level passage and answer 5 comprehension questions.

Tabled ARD vs. Disagreed ARD

Table: This is a documented pause in the meeting when there is a disagreement or additional information/documentation for decisions are needed. The ARD committee then has 10 days to reconvene. This prevents any new plan from being implemented until the committee has reconvened to make final decisions.

Disagree: This means you or the LRE (administrator), which are the only 2 voting parties, have disagreed with the plan discussed. This just documents the disagreement, to include why, but it does not prevent the IEP from being

implemented.

Just because your child has an IEP, does not mean everything needs to be addressed in an ARD meeting.

If the meeting is not going to change supports/services or placement, consider these steps first:

Contact the general education teacher(s)

General education teachers are just as responsible for the implementation of your child's IEP, as the Special Education Teacher.

Contact the case manager

This is the special education teacher assigned to your child that tracks their IEP progress.

Request a parent/teacher conference meeting with your child's general education teacher, with the case manager present.

Request a parent/teacher conference meeting with your child's general education teacher, with the case manager and an administrator present.

Request an ARD meeting

If you've gotten to the point where an ARD meeting is necessary, the concern would be if the IEP remains appropriate or there's suspicion of the IEP not being implemented with fidelity.

